

THE NEW YORK TIMES - July 30, 1948

In The Nation

An Important New Group Comes Into Action

By ARTHUR KROCK

WASHINGTON, July 29—When the plan to integrate the Armed Services was agreed on, largely the work of Ferdinand Eberstadt, who was directed to make a study of the problem by James Forrestal, then Secretary of the Navy, it was not widely recognized that the establishment of the National Security Council was one of the great potentials of the plan. And not until the recent White House conferences on the situation in Berlin was there any public evidence that this group has been put to the use for which it was established.

But the NSC was employed on that occasion to exercise the vital function which the authors of the integration plan designed for it. The fact has added significance because the eventual success of the integration act rests on two bases, and use of the several agencies created by it is one of them. The other base is the assumed loyalty and devotion of those who operate under the act, as Mr. Forrestal has emphasized several times, without which the new set-up cannot possibly attain its objectives.

Among those several agencies is another which is indispensable, the National Security Resources Board, whose chairman is Arthur M. Hill. But the NSC, by reason of its personnel and its duties, is the major body.

Reports from the White House conference, where the NSC functioned publicly for the first time as envisaged in the act, were that all, including the President, expressed satisfaction with its operating machinery when this was outlined by the executive secretary of the council, Rear Admiral Sidney W. Souers. His choice for this position was especially useful because he is close to the President, who is chairman of the council. The other members are the Secretaries of State and Defense, General Marshall and Mr. Forrestal; and the Secretaries of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, Messrs. Royall, Sullivan and Symington. Admiral Souers is assisted by James S. Lay Jr. and Harold D. Shantz.

Early Obstacles

This is the group on which depends a coordinated and sound national security policy at all times, and, though other sections of the integration law have erected obstacles in the path of the objective, and made more difficult and protracted Mr. Forrestal's effort to arrive at this, the successful operation of the NSC and its liaison with the resources agencies will help to iron out the early kinks in integration, provided always that those under Mr. Forrestal perform according to the intent of the statute.

The obstacles, however, are several and they are tough. They were formed out of compromise, as is usually the case when antagonistic viewpoints must be reconciled by political means. One compromise was, instead of creating an under-secretary of defense and officials with the rank of assistant secretary at the heads of the Army, Navy and Air Force Departments, to have no under-secretary at all; and to give the department heads the rank of secretary, with direct access to the President in the event of disagreement with their chief, the Secretary of Defense. The purpose of this was to remove the fear that otherwise the official last named would have power so great and arbitrary that it would in practice exceed that of the President himself.

The purpose was good. But the effect has been, unconsciously on those concerned, to give an exaggerated public stature to the three secretaries, who are actually assistant secretaries. Congress automatically deals with these as it does with the heads of other executive departments, and the result is an occasional open show of disagreement in the over-all Department of Defense on the allocation of money and materials. The most conspicuous instance of this was when, at the prompting of a Republican Congress and in duty bound with respect to the seventy-air-group controversy, the Air Force took a position beyond that agreed on by a Democratic Administration as public policy.

Chiefs of Staff

Another compromise in the law time to meet the objections of the Navy, was to reject the proposal a single chief of staff decide all differences on military questions. His opinion is growing that situation might arise—over the value of atomic weapons, for example—when a security might require that a decision be thoroughly reviewed for Congress which ultimately decides what use be made of money and allocations of a single chief of staff, with the authority originally proposed, would be able to obstruct this, and by his own bad management bring about disaster. Mr. Forrestal is represented as favoring the present board of three joint chiefs despite possible embarrassments, a preventive of such consequences. Integration is definitely progressing though it will work under hand until the Secretary gets budgetary control and harmony between the President and the Congress is restored to real voters. Meanwhile the NSC and the NSRB can accelerate this progress. They are doing so. The NSRB is composed of the Secretaries of State, Treasury, Defense, Interior, Agriculture, Commerce and Labor, and its secretaries.

In observing and discussing the advance of integration, with enhanced national security at minimum cost, maximum efficiency the goal, too much attention has been paid to these agencies, and the maximum use of NSC deferred until the crisis over Germany. But with the Secretary of Defense well-rounded security policy depends primarily on them.